

Emilia de Cordoba y Rubio

Cuban Revolutionary and Suffragist



Undated photograph of Emilia de Cordoba
Ecured.cu (accessed 27 July 2017)

The U.S. Census Bureau continually strives to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. For this reason, it has always embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce that is representative of the local communities. In the middle of the 19th century, the United States expanded west into areas formerly governed by Spain and Mexico. Since many of the citizens and local officials only spoke Spanish, the Census Office quickly realized that it needed to employ workers fluent in the language. The establishment of a permanent Census Bureau in 1903 and increased immigration from Cuba and Central and South America expanded the need for Spanish-speaking employees both in the field and at headquarters.

Emilia de Cordoba y Rubio was born on November 28, 1853, in San Nicolas de Bari, Mayabeque province, Cuba. Emilia’s father, Rafael de Cordoba, owned the San Jose estate, and served in the church and local community. The entire family

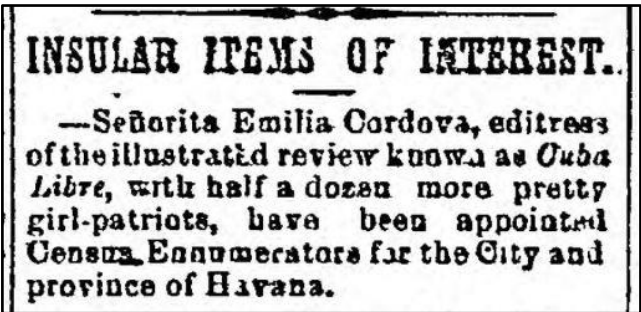
favored the abolition of slavery, as well as greater independence for Cuba, and when her father died in 1888, Emilia began to take a larger role in the community.

The Spanish authorities watched Emilia as she transported supplies to well-known prisoners, even petitioning the government on their behalf. As her acts became more brazen, such as being involved with

the Ibarra uprising, the Spanish government forced Emilia into exile in Key West, Florida.



Newspaper depiction, c. 1901
from Ecured.cu (accessed 27 July 2017)



Diario de la Marina (Havana, Cuba) 16 Sep 1899

Despite her exile, Emilia still corresponded with other Cuban patriots, participated in free-Cuba publications, and organized baseball games that served as both morale boosters and fundraisers. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, Emilia saw the opportunity to return to her homeland. Emilia joined up with Clara Barton and the Red Cross, an organization with which she could help the war effort against Spain, and allegedly received the personal thanks of future president Theodore Roosevelt for her service.



Undated drawing of Emilia de Cordoba
Diario Mayabeque (Mayabeque, Cuba)
16 October 2015

Following the cessation of hostilities, Emilia found herself in Havana, and in a position where she could greatly influence her country. In 1899, the American military governed Cuba. This presented an opportunity to the progressive Emilia, who petitioned the governor, General John Brooke, to open government employment in Cuba to women. Not only did General Brooke immediately implement this suggestion, but Emilia received the first appointment for a woman as a clerk in the Cuban government, where she worked in the Department of Public Works.

The Secretary of War, recognizing the need for accurate statistics in effective government, authorized a census of Cuba for July 1899. In order to save time and money, the census would only focus on population, education, and agriculture. Part of the plan also called for Cuban supervisors and

enumerators to do the footwork, with Americans only providing overview and administrative roles, as well as the tabulation in Washington, DC. Due in part to Emilia’s influence, 142 women worked as enumerators during the census. Emilia herself enumerated a district in Havana. Enumerators began working as soon as they received their materials and finished training—most started in September. Work officially came to a close on December 31, 1899.

Following the 1899 Census, Emilia continued working with the government as a clerk.

American troops departed in 1902, after the ratification of the new Cuban constitution. However, when the new Cuban government faltered in 1906, American troops returned that fall to restore order to the island. Once again, the military government authorized a census, which took place in 1907. As before, the Census Bureau tabulated the results in Washington, DC, but Cubans did most of the work on the ground. Once again, Emilia served as an enumerator, covering several districts in Havana.



Photograph of female enumerators from Havana, 1907



Statue of Emilia in Cordoba Park, located outside of her longtime Havana residence

Not only did Emilia open the doors to government employment for women, but she earned a reputation as someone who would look out for the rights of veterans, refugees, and former slaves. She is considered the first woman *mambisa* (independence fighter) of Cuba. Emilia was a fixture in her neighborhood of Vibora in the *municipio* Diez de Octubre in Havana, where she passed away on January 13, 1920. In 1928 the City of Havana dedicated a statue to Emilia in her old neighborhood, and renamed the park in which it sits “Cordoba Park.”

The Census Bureau is thankful for Emilia’s contributions to our mission, Cuba, and the United States.